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ABSTRACT

This study compared the social adjustment of abused and nonabused children, ages 4 to 11 years, and examined whether sociometric status and friendship quality differentially predict children's loneliness and teacher ratings of peer behavior. Thirty-five abused children from a structured residential treatment center and 43 nonabused children from the elementary school in which the abused children were enrolled were compared on sociometric status, loneliness as measured by the Child Loneliness Scale, teacher ratings of social behaviors, and observational and self-report measures of friendship quality (Friendship Observation Scale and Friendship Quality Questionnaire, respectively). Children with friends, based on reciprocal nominations during sociometric assessments, were assessed on friendship quality during free play and games playing, and were given the Friendship Quality Questionnaire. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) was given to all children. Results indicated that abused children and children without friends scored lower than nonabused and children with friends on the PPVT-R, respectively. Abused children were not rated lower sociometrically than nonabused children. Abused children did not differ from nonabused on several measures of friendship quality, resolving conflicts and helping each other. However, abused children were observed to be more negative and less proactive in interactions. Abused children rated their friendships as being more prone to conflict, higher on betrayal, and lower on caring. Friendless abused children scored highest on loneliness; nonabused children with friends scored lowest. Several friendship variables accounted for significant variance in teacher ratings and loneliness, beyond that accounted for by sociometric status. Contains 13 references. (KDFB)

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Friendship Quality, Sociometric Status, and Loneliness In Abused and Non-Abused Children

Poster Presented at the 3rd Annual Head Start Research Conference, Washington D.C., June, 1996

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ABSTRACT

The goals of the study were to compare the social adjustment of abused and nonabused children and to examine whether sociometric status and friendship quality differentially predict children's loneliness and teacher ratings of peer behavior.

Thirty-five abused children from a structured residential treatment center and 43 nonabused children from the elementary school in which the abused children were enrolled were compared on sociometric status, loneliness, teacher rated behavior, and two measures of friendship quality (observational and self-report). All children were assessed on loneliness. The children with friends (based on reciprocal nominations during sociometric assessments) were assessed on friendship quality during free play and game playing and were administered the Parker & Asher (1993) Friendship Quality Questionnaire.

Results revealed that abused children were not rated lower sociometrically than nonabused children. Abused children did not differ from control children on several measures of friendship quality, such as resolving conflicts and helping each other. However, abused children were observed to be more negative and less proactive in their interactions. They also rated their friendships as being more conflictual, and as higher on betrayal and lower on caring. Friendless abused children scored highest on loneliness; control children with friends scored lowest. Several of the friendship variables accounted for significant variance in teacher ratings and loneliness, above and beyond that accounted for by sociometric status.

The results challenge the common assumption that abused children's relationships are always more maladaptive than nonabused children's. The pattern of difficulties that were exhibited by abused children (conflict, betrayal) provide a focus for peer-based interventions in treatment centers and schools. This study contributes to the scant literature on abused children's friendships and illustrates the importance of a multi-method assessment of social adjustment for abused and nonabused children.

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Introduction

Childhood peer relationships have been found to influence social and emotional developmental outcomes (Hartup, 1983). Early theorists suggested that peer relations contribute uniquely to the development of cooperation, morality, interpersonal sensitivity, and mutuality in relationships (Sullivan, 1953). More recently, attention has turned to the familial determinants of peer relationships. Family environments consisting of positive developmental histories in both parents' families of origin, satisfactory marital relations, and sensitive, stable and supportive parent-child interactions are conducive to secure parent-child attachments which, in turn, leads to more successful relationships with peers (e.g. Cicchetti, Lynch, Shonk, & Manly, 1992). On the other hand, some dysfunctional family environments may lead to maladaptive peer relationships. Investigation of these types of families may provide new insights into the role of family factors in the emergence of peer relationships. This project is based on this perspective and aims to determine how children who experience a history of abuse in their family function with their peers.

Theorists focusing on parent/child attachment (see Price, 1993, for a review) focus on caregiver sensitivity and child behavior. Abused children have been found to exhibit a disorganized/disoriented pattern of attachment consisting of negative, aggressive, and often unfocused and confusing behavior (Meuller & Silverman, 1989). This pattern of infant behavior is thought to result from inconsistent discipline and caretaker insensitivity. According to this perspective, the parent-child attachment relationship serves as a basis for the development of a cognitive working model of relationships, which guides subsequent social interactions outside the family, including relationships with peers. If a child is raised by abusive parents and his/her emotional needs have not been met, he/she may form representations (or cognitive working models) of other people as frightening and untrustworthy (e.g. Dean, Malik, Richards and Stringer, 1986) and may develop a negative representation of the self as unworthy of love (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1991). These cognitive working models may serve as mediators between family interactions and the child's peer relationships.

It is important to better understand social skill deficits because many researchers have found that poor social skills and unsuccessful peer relations put children at risk for later negative developmental outcomes such as drug use, juvenile delinquency, and dropping out of school (see Parker & Asher, 1987, for a review). Abused children are especially at risk, since their peer relations have been found to be lacking in many respects (Haskett & Kistner, 1991).

Few studies have been conducted on the peer relationships of abused children and most of the existing studies focus on toddlers and preschoolers (e.g. George & Main, 1979). Taken together, however, these studies show disturbed patterns of interaction, with maltreated toddlers exhibiting such behaviors as unprovoked aggression, withdrawal from the peer group, hitting distressed or crying peers, and approach/avoidance behaviors which suggest abused children's ambivalence toward their peer group (George & Main, 1979; Hoffman-Plotkin & Twentyman, 1984). Peers also view abused children as less appealing to play with, and they often do not reciprocate the initiations attempted by abused children (Haskett & Kistner, 1991). This set of studies suggests that young abused children have less developed social skills and are often rejected by their peer group.

Recently, many researchers have emphasized the importance of distinguishing between peer acquaintances and friends, and between peer sociometric status and ability to form friendships with one or more persons (e.g. Hartup, 1992). Bukowski and Hoza (1989) explain the distinction between the two concepts. They argue that sociometric status (degree of acceptance) is the experience of being liked or accepted by one's peer group while friendship is a specific dyadic construct that refers to an experience between two individuals. Therefore, acceptance, or sociometric status, is a group variable, whereas friendship is a more personal, close mutual dyadic relationship variable.

While friendship in nonabused children has received some theoretical and empirical attention, there are fewer studies of the friendships of abused children. Since friendship is an emotionally salient relationship with more challenges than acquaintanceships, some deficits in abused children's interpersonal skills may be more apparent in this context (Parker, Levendosky & Okun, 1993). Abused children are often rejected by the general peer group (Haskett & Kistner, 1991), but they may still be able to form friendships with one or more other children. It is important, therefore, to examine the specific types of interactions and the quality of the friendships in which abused children are engaged.

To date, only a few observational studies of the friendship interactions of abused children are available. Parker, Levendosky & Okun (1993) found that abused boys and girls did not differ from non-abused comparison children in their rates of cooperative, competitive or betrayal behaviors toward their friends during the game which requires either cooperating with each other or betraying each other for one's own advantage. The friends of abused boys (but not girls) used less betrayal, were less competitive and more cooperative toward their abused friends than were the friends of nonabused boys in the control group. In another study using the same sample of 9-14 year old abused children, Parker and Herrera (1995) again examined both individual and dyadic characteristics of the friendships and found that abused children and their friends were less often on-task, were more negative while discussing their friendships, were more conflictual while playing games, and displayed less overall intimacy and positive emotionality in discussions with friends.

It is unclear from these studies whether or not maltreated children's friendship are markedly different from those of nonabused children. It remains to be discovered whether or not abused children's friendships are always more conflictual and negative or whether some abused children's friendships function similarly to those of non-abused children and how these friendships affect social and psychological outcomes, such as feelings of loneliness.

There is little research on abused children's peer relationships and loneliness outcomes. In one of the two existing studies is the topic, Price (1993) found that abused preschoolers placed in new peer groups reported feeling significantly more lonely than did non-abused preschoolers in the same groups. However, Price's (1993) sample was extremely small (N = 10) so further studies must replicate these findings before firm conclusions can be drawn. In the other available study, Grayston, deLuca and Boyes (1992) examined loneliness in 35 7-12 year old sexually abused girls and found no differences in loneliness between the abused sample and a matched control group of nonabused girls. In view of the inconsistent results from these two studies on abused children's loneliness, it is still unclear whether or not abused children feel significantly more lonely that non-abused children their age.

Hypotheses

According to the theoretical perspective above (attachment theory and cognitive working models), as well as the empirical investigations outlined above, it is hypothesized that abused children's family contexts would lead these children to develop more maladaptive and negative social relationships than non-abused children.

It is hypothesized that 1) teachers will rate abused children higher on negative peer behaviors and lower on positive peer behaviors than non-abused children 2) abused children will be lower in sociometric status (as rated by classmates) than will nonabused children 3) abused children will themselves rate the quality of their friendships (as assessed by self-report questionnaire data) more negatively than non-abused children 4) abused children will exhibit less positive and more negative interactions than non-abused children during observations of their play with friends 5) abused children will report higher feelings of loneliness than will nonabused children 6) friendship and sociometric status will make differential contributions to the outcomes of loneliness and teacher rated peer behaviors.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 35 abused and 43 non-abused children, or 78 total participants. The abused group ranged in age from 4.3-11.5 years (mean = 8.7) with 22 boys. The non-abused group ranged from 5.5-11.6 (mean = 8.7) years of age with 23 boys. The ethnic distribution for each group is as follows: (Abused) 51% Euro-American, 20% African American, 9% Latino and 20% Bi-Racial/Other; (Non-Abused) 73% Euro-American, 3% African American, 19% Latino and 5% Bi-Racial/Other. The percentage of Euro-American versus minority children in the control group was higher than in the abused group (X^2 (1, 78) = 3.57, $p<.06$) but the groups were similar on the other demographic variables (age and gender). See Table 1 for more specific demographic information regarding abused children's abuse history, family characteristics, and other background information. No other demographic information was available on control children.

The abused children are residents of Childhelp USA, a residential treatment center for severely abused and neglected children. This institution implements a very structured program of behavioral intervention. Children in residence receive individual therapy, group therapy, psychotropic medications, as well as a behavioral reinforcement program that is used in conjunction with the children's teachers in their off-site school setting. This structured program may lead to some similarities between abused and non-abused children. The intensive therapy may influence abused children to behave more similarly to their non-abused classmates than would be expected otherwise.

The non-abused control children were selected from the public elementary school classrooms in which the abused children were enrolled. The larger group of 15 classrooms was administered sociometric measures; however, only those children who matched the abused children demographically (age, gender, majority/minority status, having a reciprocal friend or not) participated in the main study. The elementary school is in the same city as the residential treatment center, a lower SES agricultural town in southern California.

Procedures

The sample consists of 15 friendship pairs of abused and 19 pairs of nonabused children.
Each friendship pair consists of two same gender, similar age children. The nonabused friendship pairs were matched as closely as possible to the abused pairs on age, gender, ethnicity (minority vs. majority group status), SES and school. The children were paired into friendships according to reciprocal nominations of "the child I like to play with most" during sociometric interviews. Children of all levels of social acceptance had reciprocal friendships. Friendship status by each sociometric group (high, average, and low acceptance according to the top, middle, and lower thirds of the distribution of scores) and abuse group is shown in Table 2.

Friendship pairs were determined by matching the top 3 "best liked" playmates to each other. If there was a reciprocal nomination, the two children were paired and then assessed using the friendship measures described below. These friendship pairs were made up of only non-abused control children with other non-abused control children and abused children only with other abused children (no abused child received reciprocal nominations from non-abused classmates).The abused children were asked by their therapist at Childhelp USA to name their
three most liked playmates at Childhelp (there were 80 from which to choose, and 10 who lived with each child in his/her own "cottage", or residential unit).

Since no abused child received reciprocal nominations from classmates, these nominations were compiled to form abused children's friendship pairs, drawing on other abused children at Childhelp USA."Friendless" status for both abused and non-abused children was determined if a child a) had no reciprocal nominations, b) no one in his/her class (or at Childhelp) nominated him/her as one of their top three best friends, and c) the child stated that he/she had no other "best" friends outside of the classroom. All three criteria were utilized in order to maintain a more definitive category of "friendlessness". A child may have no friends in his/her class but may have friends elsewhere; therefore, all three criteria were applied in the formation of the friendless group.

Only those children who received reciprocal friendship nominations and were paired into friendships were administered the second phase of data collection, the "friendship" measures. Observational data on friendship quality consisted of observations during free play and structured game playing segments, which were coded on 27 dimensions, and then compiled into 4 factors which emerged from a PROMAX factor analysis. These 4 factors are: Proactive Behavior, Negative Behavior, Organized Play, and Dominance. This observational measure was created for this study by Flyr, Howe, & Parke (1996). Self-reports of friendship quality using Parker & Asher's (1993) Friendship Quality Questionnaire were also obtained and the 41 items were compiled into the 6 subscales outlined by Parker & Asher's (1993) principle components analysis. The 6 scales are: Validation and Caring, Conflict and Betrayal, Resolving Conflicts, Companionship and Recreation, Intimate Exchange, and Help and Guidance. Friendless children were administered only a verbal intelligence (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised) and loneliness measure (Asher, Hymel & Renshaw's [1984] Child Loneliness Scale).

Results

Verbal Intelligence (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised

There was a significant group difference for abused and non-abused children, with abused children (M = 78.62) scoring lower, F (1, 69) = 15.28, p<.001, than non-abused children (M = 97.38). Children with friends (M = 91.67) also scored significantly higher than friendless (M = 81.33) children, F (1, 69)= 4.33, p<.05. These differences led to the decision to include IQ as a covariate in all analyses of variance in order to ensure that any further results were not due to differences in verbal intelligence. However, IQ did not exert influence on any of the results.

Differences in Teacher Rated Behaviors

It was hypothesized that abused children would be rated more negatively than their non-abused counterparts. This prediction was examined using Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVA), with IQ as the control variable. Group status (abused vs. non-abused), friendship status (friend vs. friendless), and gender were entered as independent variables. Abused children were rated more negatively than non-abused children on some, but not all of these teacher rated behaviors: well-liked; avoids others; helps, shares and takes turns; interrupts others' activities; says mean things/uses bad words; hits, kicks, bites; has close/best friends. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 3. IQ had no effect on any of these results. After group differences were assessed on individual behaviors, composite measures of "positive" and of "negative" teacher rated behaviors were compiled in order to simplify later regression analyses using teacher ratings as outcomes.

Differences in Sociometric Status

Again, ANCOVA's were used, controlling for IQ. IQ did not influence the following results. Contrary to our predictions, there were no significant differences for abuse status (group). There were also no gender effects. There was a significant difference between those children who had reciprocal friendships (M = .301) and those who were "friendless" (M = -.584), F (1, 64) = 10.46, p<.001. Children with friends were rated more positively by their classmates than were children without reciprocal friendships, regardless of abuse status.

Differences in Friendship Quality - Self Report (Friendship Quality Questionnaire)

Each of Parker and Asher's (1993) Friendship Quality Questionnaire's 6 subscales were examined separately, using ANCOVA's. Friendship status was not used as an independent variable in these analyses as only children with friends were administered the friendship measures. There were group differences (abuse vs. control) for only 2 of the 6 self-report scales (Caring and Validation and Conflict and Betrayal). See Table 4 for means and standard deviations for these subscales.

Differences in Friendship Quality - Observations (Friendship Observation Scale)

ANCOVA's were performed on the 4 observational factors, controlling for IQ. IQ had no effect on these results. There were group differences on 3 of the 4 observed behavior factors. No differences for Dominance. See Table 5 for means and standard deviations of the FOS factors.

Differences in Feelings of Loneliness

ANCOVA's revealed a significant interaction, as predicted, between the group and friendship variables, F (1, 68) = 3.91, $p<.05$), with friendless abused children rating highest on loneliness and control children with friends scoring the lowest. Post hoc examinations revealed that friendless abused children were significantly more lonely than the other three groups, which were not significantly different from each other.

Differential Influences of Sociometric Status and Friendship Quality on the Measure of Loneliness

To evaluate the hypothesis that friendship quality should be considered as well as sociometric status when predicting subjective feelings of loneliness and teacher rated peer behaviors, we entered sociometric scores as well as the 6 Parker and Asher (1993) FQQ subscales into 6 simultaneous hierarchical multiple regression analyses. This is the same method utilized by Parker & Asher (1993) to test a similar hypothesis with non-abused children. Sociometric status was entered first and then the 6 quality of friendship variables were entered into the simultaneous hierarchical regressions. The same method was also used with the quality of friendship variables entered first and sociometric status added second. This same multiple regression format was utilized with the observed friendship factors and sociometric status. The four FOS factors were entered first, and then second, in combination with sociometric status.

Results are presented in Tables 6-8 in terms of the predictive power of sociometric status alone, the friendship variables alone, as well as whether adding sociometric status to friendship or friendship to sociometric status accounts for significantly more variance in the prediction of loneliness and teacher rated behaviors.

Discussion

Results support using multi-method assessments of abused and non-abused children's behavior. We should consider more than social status in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of a child's social behavior. We also must look beyond a child's abuse status because abuse status alone often does not determine how a child will be perceived by teachers or peers. The friendship variable appears to be much more salient during classroom ratings by teachers and peers than does the abuse status of the child, as abused children were not rated lower sociometrically, nor more negatively on all teacher rated behaviors.

It is both interesting and encouraging to note that not only were the two groups similar sociometrically, but abused and non-abused children's friendships in this sample were quite similar on many dimensions. Abused and non-abused children did not differ on observations of dominating each other during play, nor on self-reported levels of resolving conflicts, helping each other, or spending quality time together. Girls reported being more intimate than boys, regardless of abuse status, indicating that abused children have very similar friendship skills and experience similar interactive processes than do non-abused children.

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A major challenge for future research is to discover the origins of conflict resolution and social skills in abused children. In spite of the negative family interactional history experienced by abused children, they were still able to develop a variety of social skills. The roles of peers, counselors, teachers, other family members, and the structured residential treatment environment, in helping children develop these skills need more attention.

Although abused and non-abused children were similar on many areas of friendship, they also differed in some important ways. Abused children in this sample were observed to be more negative, less proactive, and for boys, to exhibit less organized play, than their non-abused counterparts. They also reported themselves as experiencing less caring and validation and more conflict and betrayal in their friendships than other children. These are important differences in both observed and self-reported negative behaviors. The cognitive and social processes underlying group differences in self-reported friendship quality should be a focus for future research.

It should be emphasized that children's self-reports are based on the whole of their interaction experiences with these friends, while observational data are based on a limited sampling of observed activities, so it is difficult to compare results using these disparate methodologies. Observations cannot easily tap infrequent or more private elements of friendship such as perceived intimacy (Parker & Asher, 1993). Moreover, we did not find uniformly high correlations between our own observational and children's self-report data, indicating that distinctive qualitative components of friendships are assessed by observational and self-report data.

The types of social skill deficits found with both our observational and self-report data (conflictual, aggressive, and negative behavior) been found in previous work to be associated with many maladaptive developmental outcomes such as low academic success, substance use, poor marital relations, and unstable employment (e.g. Caspi, Elder, and Bem, 1987). Because negative behavior, aggression, and conflictual peer relations are related to many long term developmental problems, it is important to intervene with these school aged children as early as possible. If their negative behaviors with friends continue over the long term, they may not be able to maintain these friendships. Future studies should examine the duration of friendship differences in abused and non-abused samples.

On the other hand, Hartup (1992) also points out that conflicts can make positive as well as negative contributions to development. Having conflicts with friends can aid in the development of conflict management and resolution skills. Hartup emphasizes that friends are not usually willing to risk their relationships and so are likely to work hard at resolving difficulties. Friendships may help children to feel less lonely and isolated. In the present sample, the friendless abused children reported feeling the most lonely while control children with friends reported the least loneliness.

Perhaps these abused children's history of conflict and lack of nurturing by parents leads them to feel as if they are alone in the world. This may be especially true for severely abused children, as many of them have experienced rejection in numerous foster home and group care facilities, which, in combination with numerous school changes and having

to make new friends several times, may lead to more intense feelings of loneliness and isolation. The friendship variable accounted for much of the variance in loneliness, while loneliness did not differ by sociometric group, indicating the need to consider both types of social relationships when predicting outcomes such as loneliness.

It appears from these results that for the prediction of loneliness and teacher rated behaviors, sociometric status and friendship variables are differential predictors. For the loneliness outcome, only the observational friendship variables could predict loneliness. Sociometric status did not predict loneliness.

On the other hand, the results here are inconsistent with Parker & Asher's (1993) findings that children's perceptions of friendships were significantly predictive of loneliness, above and beyond the variance accounted for by sociometric status in their sample of non-abused children. Both sample size and sample characteristics may account for this discrepancy.

Okun, Parker & Levendosky (1994) maintain that cases of extreme and severe abuse (such as those used in our sample) may show different relationships between predictor variables and adjustment outcomes than those found for non-abused children. The disparities in abused and non-abused children's family interactional history, their consequent negative cognitive working models as well as their expectations for and perceptions about relationships may all account for the differences in predicting outcomes for severely abused children.

In our sample, none of the self-report friendship variables (FQQ) were significant predictors of loneliness. Only the FOS (observed) Proactive Behavior Factor and the FOS Dominance Factor could significantly predict loneliness; however, the most variance was accounted for when the FOS Proactive Behavior Factor was added to Sociometric Status. In addition to the disparity in sample characteristics, perhaps our observational data can assess more subtle behavior patterns, of which the children themselves are not aware, that relate more strongly to their feelings of loneliness. In support of this argument is Newcomb and Bagwell's (1995) recent meta-analysis of 87 studies of children's friendship which found that observational data exhibited stronger effect sizes and accounted for more variance in child outcomes than did any other type of friendship assessment.

Sociometric status and friendship also differentially predicted the positive teacher rated behaviors. Sociometric status alone accounted for significant variance in positive ratings, and by adding four (two observational and two self-report) of the ten friendship variables, the models were significantly improved. This is consistent with Parker & Asher's (1993) finding that friendship quality accounts for significant variance in another outcome -- loneliness, above and beyond that of sociometric status. In the current sample, the four friendship variables alone also significantly predicted these teacher ratings.

Unlike positive teacher ratings, negative teacher ratings could not be predicted by sociometric status alone. Only friendship variables (three observational and three self-report) accounted for significant amounts of variance in these negative teacher ratings. Again, we see that sociometric status is not necessarily the best, nor the only predictor of child adjustment (Parker & Asher, 1993). In this case, friendship data were more predictive of the teacher ratings of negative behavior than sociometric status.

These findings support the use of all three measures of peer relationships (sociometric status, observational measures of friendship and self-report measures of friendship) in order to ascertain fully how children's social competence is related to various measures of adjustment. Parker & Asher (1993) suggest that children's feelings of loneliness can arise from several sources that, when occurring either alone, or together, can seriously undermine children's feelings of well-being. Being poorly accepted by peers, lacking a friend, or being involved in a friendship, each contributes to the child's subjective sense of well-being and connectedness to agemates.

In addition, we have found the same argument to be warranted for the examination of other measures of social competence, besides loneliness. Specifically, teacher rated peer behaviors, both positive and negative, could be predicted differentially by sociometric status, friendship observations and self-reported friendship quality.

Implications

The findings emphasize the need to consider both sociometric status and friendship measures when predicting child adjustment. This work illustrates the importance of separating, both theoretically and methodologically, the effects of social acceptance and having close friends, as well as the quality of those friendships (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989).

Second, we can no longer assume that abused children are generally disliked by their classmates. They were not rated lower sociometrically than other children. However, our sample size limits the statistical power to draw conclusive inferences from these findings. In addition, these children were in residential treatment and the daily behavioral skills interventions may partially account for the similarities between abused and non-abused children's behaviors in the classroom. Further research is necessary to replicate the similar levels of social acceptance found here between severely abused children and their non-abused classmates.

In addition to reconsidering our assumptions regarding sociometric differences in abused and non-abused children, our results suggest that we need to re-evaluate our assumptions about abused children's maladaptive peer relationships. Abused children's friendships do seem to be more negative and conflictual, but these conflicts occur in conjunction with much quality time spent together, similar levels of helping each other, being in control of play tasks to the same degree, as well as swift and effective conflict resolution, or "making up". The critical issue that remains unclear is the reason for this pattern of results. Future research should focus on why some aspects of abused children's social behavior are affected, while others are not.

These data illustrate the need for early direct intervention in the peer domain; specifically, social skills training and implementing "buddy systems" for low status and lonely children (see Furman, Rahe, & Hartup, 1979). If low status, or friendless children, can be paired with higher status children who have friends, this type of peer intervention can expose unpopular and lonely children to new social experiences and their social skills may increase. By conducting peer based social skills interventions in these early elementary school years, both in the classroom and on the playground (with assigned play partners) perhaps abused children can be exposed to enough positive social interaction and, in combination with direct skills training, they may improve their chances for positive long term social adjustment (Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Price, 1993).

Direct intervention aimed at improving existing relationships or helping friendless children develop close peer relationships could serve as a vehicle for modifying the negative working models of social relationships abused children often have. Second, friends could serve as healthy attachment figures, which could in turn, prevent some of the negative sequelae associated with abuse, such as long term residential care, drug use, delinquency, and continuing the cycle of abuse with their own children (Erickson & Egeland, 1987).

In sum, discovering that even severely abused children not only can adjust to public school, but can make close friends, bodes well for the academic and social possibilities of all abused children, who have previously been found to be generally dysfunctional in the peer domain (Hoffman-Plotkin & Twentyman, 1984). Perhaps the multi-method approach utilized herein has led to a more in-depth understanding of the peer and friendship relations of severely abused children and their non-abused classmates.

Table 1.
Demographic Information on Abused Children. All information should be interpreted with caution as it is based on case files compiled by several different agencies and may be faulty, subjective or unreliable.

Average Grade in School		2.6 (range K-5)
Average Length of Residence at Childhelp Village		15.8 mo. (rg 3-52 mo)
Avg Abuse Severity (Subjective Rating on 1-5 Scale)		3.8 (range 2-5)
Avg Age at First Incident		24 mo (rg 1-138 mo)
Avg Length of Time of Abuse		30 mo (rg 1-138 mo)
Consistent vs. Sporadic Abuse		78% vs. 6% (16% unknown)
Types of Abuse:	Physical	68%
	Emotional	28%
	Neglect	68%
	Sexual	65%
	Sexual Exploit.	5%
	In Utero Expos.	37%
(No child suffered only 1 type of abuse; avg=3 types)		
Perpetrator:	Biol. Father	40%
	Biol. Mother	82%
	Step-Father	6%
	Foster Parent	7%
	Other Male	23%
	Other Female	6%
	Unknown	14%
Contact w/Biological Family		68%
(mostly by phone and mostly not by the abuser)		
Contact w/Previous Foster Fam.		17%
Parent Characteristics:	Relinquished Ch.	11%
	Abandoned Child	11%
	In Mental Hosp.	3%
	In Regular Hosp	3%
	Incarcerated	34%
	Deceased	6%
	Abused as Child	20%
	Higher Education	5%
	Substance Prob.	60%
	Criminal History	35%
	Counseling at Childhelp	14%

Table 2.
Friendship distribution by sociometric status group and abuse status group.

	Has Friend (N)	Friendless (N)
Low Sociometric Status		
(ABUSED)	6	7
(NON-ABUSED)	6	6
Average Sociometric Status		
(ABUSED)	8	2
(NON-ABUSED)	10	3
High Sociometric Status		
(ABUSED)	7	1
(NON-ABUSED)	18	2

Table 3.
Standardized Means and Standard Deviations for Individual Teacher Rated Behaviors before Composites were Constructed. (Only significant results are presented)

Well-Liked

	Friend		*Friendless*	
	M	SD	M	SD
	.286	.132	-.732	.231
Not Well-Liked				
	.229	.135	-.691	.236

Has Close/Best Friends

	Friend		*Friendless*	
	M	SD	M	SD
(Abused)	-.117	.201	-.087	.297
(Control)	.436	.170	-.890	.311

Helps/Shares/Takes Turns

(Abused)	-.373	.212	-.021	.315
(Control)	.494	.189	-.421	.329

Is Not Mean but Interrupts/Disrupts

	Boys		*Girls*	
	M	SD	M	SD
(Abused)	-.301	.217	-.513	.262
(Control)	-.277	.251	.730	.217

Avoids Others/Plays Alone

	Boys				*Girls*			
	Friend		*Friendless*		*Friend*		*Friendless*	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
(Abused)	-.558	.259	-.423	.388	.180	.316	-.903	.473
(Control)	.327	.219	-.915	.537	.354	.283	.532	.380

*All negative items were reverse coded so in all cases, higher, or more positive numbers, refer to more prosocial behavior.

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Table 4.
Standardized Means and Standard Deviations for the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (FQQ).Only significant results are presented.

	Abused		*Control*	
	M	SD	M	SD
Caring and Validation	-.219	.190	.432	.162
Conflict and Betrayal	-.399	.190	.563	.162

	Boys		*Girls*	
	M	SD	M	SD
Intimate Exchange	-.216	.154	.479	.198

Table 5.
Standardized Means and Standard Deviations for the Friendship Observation Scales (FOS). Only significant results are presented.

	Boys		*Girls*	
	M	SD	M	SD
Negative Behavior				
(Abused)	-1.024	.191	.056	.255
(Control)	.530	.160	.552	.209
Organized Play				
(Abused)	-.648	.239	.758	.319
(Control)	.215	.201	-.292	.261

	Abused		*Control*	
	M	SD	M	SD
Proactive Behavior	-.283	.205	.309	.167

Table 6.
Regression of Sociometric Status, FQQ Scales, and FOS Factors on Loneliness. Only models that significantly predicted loneliness (or showed a non-significant trend where p<.10) are presented.

Variable Entered First (Second)	R Square	beta	Change in R-square	t	p
FOS Proactive Behavior	.09	-.26	.09	-1.70	.10
FOS Dominance	.13	-.36	.13	-2.78	.01

Table 7.
Regression of Sociometric Status, FQQ Scales and FOS Factors on Positive Teacher Rated Behaviors. Only models that significantly predicted (or showed a trend where p<.10) teacher ratings are presented.

Variable Entered First (Second)	R Square	beta	Change in R-square	t	p
Sociometric Status	.11	.33	.11	2.47	.05
(FOS Proactive Behavior)	.17	.60	.06	1.80	.01
(FOS Negative Behavior)	.23	-.36	.12	-2.83	.01
(FQQ Conflict/ Betrayal)	.16	-.22	.05	-1.67	.10
(FQQ Intimate Exchange)	.16	.22	.05	1.64	.10
FOS Proactive Behavior	.15	.39	.15	3.06	.01
FOS Negative Behavior	.17	-.41	.17	-3.27	.01
FOS Organized Play	.06	.24	.06	1.81	.08
(Sociometric Status)	.15	.34	.09	2.59	.05
FQQ Intimate Exchange	.16	.31	.16	2.34	.05

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Table 8.
Regression of Sociometric Status, FQQ Scales and FOS Factors on Negative Teacher Rated Behaviors. Only models that significantly predicted (or showed a non-significant trend where p<.10) teacher ratings are presented.

Variable Entered First (Second)	R Square	beta	Change in R-square	t	p
FOS Proactive Behavior	.13	-.37	.13	-2.86	.01
FOS Negative Behavior	.18	.42	.18	3.41	.01
FOS Organized Play	.12	-.34	.12	-2.64	.01
FQQ Caring/ Validation	.07	-.26	.07	-2.00	.06
FQQ Conflict/ Betrayal	.14	.38	.14	2.99	.01
FQQ Intimate Exchange	.09	-.31	.09	-2.35	.05

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